THE MUSIC OF EDWIN GRASSE

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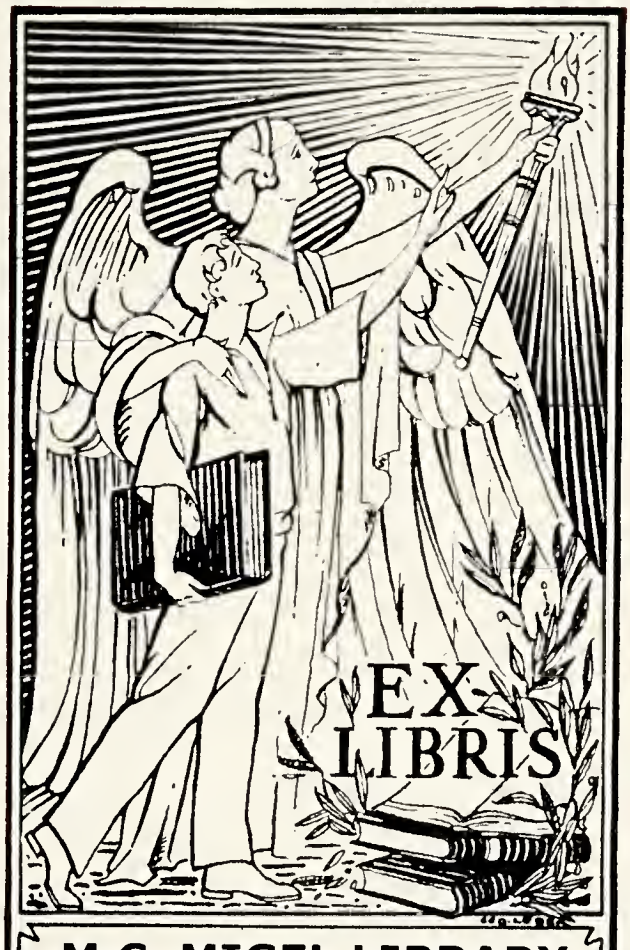

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being raised comes to us in a letter describing the activities of the Junior Anti-Suffrage League of New York City. This League of some ninety young girls has already raised the sum of $850, which it has contributed to the National Aeroplane Fund. This Anti-Suffrage League has taken an excellent way of refuting the argument that anti-suffragists are not interested in public questions and do not consider themselves responsible for the promotion of the country's welfare. This example might well be followed by any organization of public-spirited women.

THE MAHLER CHORAL SYMPHONY

One of the musical events of the year was the performance of Mahler's "Eighth Symphony" in Philadelphia. This is the first time this immense work has been given in the United States. It was performed in Philadelphia on March 2, 3, and 4. It is to be repeated in New York on April 9. Whatever one may think of the value of this work, there can be no question that its performance is a conspicuous occurrence of the musical season.

Leopold Stokowski, the conductor of the Philadelphia orchestra, who led the Symphony, says of the first time he heard it: "I have often wondered what were the sensations of the first white man in America who came face to face with the Falls of Niagara. Something of the same feeling of awe—the same flashing insight into infinity—I felt before this mighty art work of Mahler's."

In 1910, at Munich, Mr. Stokowski was admitted to the rehearsals for the first performance of this work, given under the direction of Mahler himself. From that time Mr. Stokowski was bent on giving this work in America. When the war broke out, he was stranded in Munich with the score and the American rights of performance; and after a series of misadventures on his way home he brought them safely to New York. A year ago the trial of voices began, preliminary to the formation of the three choruses—two of four hundred maturer singers, one of one hundred and fifty boys and girls—a total of nine hundred and fifty vocalists, carefully chosen and diligently trained. Not until nearly a year later, on the evening of the dress rehearsal on March 1, did the whole corps of singers come together with the orchestra of one hundred and ten players.

There were eight soloists, all of them singers of distinction, two of them from the Metropolitan Opera Company. A correspondent of The Outlook, Mr. Fullerton Waldo, whom our readers will remember as having contributed a report of the Bach Choir at Bethlehem two years ago, and who attended the performance of the Symphony in Philadelphia, has supplied us with an interesting account of the effect of this work upon the singers. When they first began to struggle with the tortuous progressions and intervals with which Mahler is pitilessly free, they felt dismayed, and several were tempted to desist, with the feeling that it was not worth while to try to put before the public music sure to sound so ugly and so queer. The choral singers had for the most part never sung any music approaching in difficulty the choruses of the Latin hymn "Veni Creator" and the final scene of "Faust" that constitute the Symphony. The hard places seemed a gratuitous affront to the vocal organs, and certainly graceless for the listening laity. But as the rehearsals went on the singers were converted. They felt that they had a mission to perform and that they must make their message understood. And Mr. Waldo adds, "They did."

The Symphony takes an hour and a half to sing. The first half-hour is occupied by the Latin hymn; the rest of the time is given to a curious promiscuity of allegory, pseudo-mythology, and mysticism, wherein the soul mounts upward toward the vision of the beatified Marguerite. Resounding choruses, mellifluous melody, chamois-like leaps of the voices over vocal abysses, a trio of refreshing concord, groping intervals of musical doubt and perplexity, outbursts of triumph and rejoicing, all lead to a great climax.

On the eve of the performance one hundred dollars was offered for a seat at any concert of the series. The house was crowded on each occasion. Mr. Stokowski was the recipient of a demonstration in which audience and chorus joined, and received a victor's wreath of bronze.

As in commerce, so in music—bigness of itself is not badness, but neither is it greatness. If this work lives, it will be for some other reason than that it calls for somewhat more than a thousand performers.

THE MUSIC OF EDWIN GRASSE

In the midst of such a wilderness of wild dissonance as certain modern composers invite their hearers to wander through it is a

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relief to come upon an oasis of melody. Such was the recital given last week in New York City by the American violinist and composer Edwin Grasse. Besides the "Devil's Trill Sonata" by Tartini and some other familiar works by Schumann, Saint-Saëns, Dvořák, and Schubert, Mr. Grasse played a sonata of his own in A Minor (for the first time at a public performance), two songs without words, a sprightly and charming "Wellenspiel" on muted strings, and, as an encore, his "Polonaise."

Mr. Grasse is a musical descendant of the German romanticists of the nineteenth century, such as Schumann and Mendelssohn. Indeed, his works have a family resemblance to Mendelssohn's compositions in their buoyant and flowing melody; but they show that they belong to a later generation by the way in which they glide from one key to another. There is little that is severe or austere in Mr. Grasse's works. There is nothing tragic, nothing epic, in them. Mr. Grasse is essentially a lyric composer. His violin does not speak; it sings. According to Mr. Grasse, life is happy. There are minor strains in his music, but they are not the strains of real, deep grief. They have that sort of youthful sadness that is part of youth's pleasures.

It has been said by a friend of his, Mr. Robert Haven Schauffler, in an article published some years ago in The Outlook, that "Grasse's great ambition is to be such a musician that people will lose sight of his blindness." For our part, while we respect Mr. Grasse's refusal to be placed in any special category because he is blind, we wonder if his message of optimism has not the more force because it comes from one who, unlike the fortunate and pampered Mendelssohn, well named Felix, bears the handicap of sightlessness. If such a man finds that, after all, the world is well ordered, the rest of us, it would seem, ought to be ashamed of being skeptics. And after hearing Grasse's music, one is inclined to wonder whether some of our modern composers who seem to exult in being morbid are not really handicapped because they are not blind.

Just as the real horrors of war are likely to make the pretended horrors of the supermodernists in music seem sickly and dull, so, possibly, Mr. Grasse's blindness has saved him from taking delight, as some of his contemporaries do, in the false pretense of musical darkness.

Mr. Grasse was born in New York thirty-one years ago last August. He lost his sight when he was four weeks old. From very early years he showed responsiveness to music, and began composing at seven years of age. At thirteen years of age he went to Belgium to study with César Thomson, and later made a tour, playing in Berlin, Leipsic, Munich, Vienna, and London.

Mr. Grasse ought to be heard oftener than he is. There are few violinists who give such evident pleasure to their audiences. Whatever the critics may say as to technique, an audience of discriminating and intelligent listeners will always discover the real musician. Mr. Grasse's technique is remarkable, but he wins his audience, not because of his technical mastery of the violin, but because he understands the music that he plays and knows how to convey it to his hearers.

A POLICE CHORUS

A chorus of policemen has started spontaneously in the New York City force. A few of the men belonged to singing clubs. At a funeral of one of the members of the force a quartette of policemen sang, and Commissioner Woods heard them. The idea then came to him that there might be developed a police chorus. He looked about for some one who could take up the work of training the men, and asked Mr. Charles L. Safford, organist and choirmaster of St. George's Church, on Stuyvesant Square, to do it. Mr. Safford consented, and took it up as a piece of citizenship. Volunteers were called for—just the men who were interested. There were about a hundred and fifty applications. It was decided, however, for the purpose of keeping the chorus more flexible, to limit the number to a hundred. There is therefore a waiting list at Headquarters now.

The traits of character developed by the discipline of the police force have given to these men certain qualifications for chorus singing which other men lack. The conduct of the rehearsal is so serious and dignified and the morale of the chorus is so good that there is no question of discipline at all. The fact that these men are volunteers, that they are fond of music, that there is no question of trying to "make good" at Headquarters, and that they have as a trainer a man of experience in this sort of task, has started the chorus well on the way to success. Up to last week there have been twelve rehearsals.

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